EXPLORING 'LEARNER IDENTITY': THE GUIDING IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

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ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to explore the concept of 'learner identity' and its relevance in the contemporary educational context. Amidst the changing educational landscape, an insight into the perception of students as learners, in the process of acquiring education, would prove to be instrumental in assimilating their many identities better in a common learning space. Students' perception of their learner identity could be positive or negative depending on their educational and social experiences, which in turn may influence their perception towards learning. It is crucial to throw some light on the identification process the students engage in and how this identity comes into existence along with the various factors involved in it. With this rationale in place and owing to the limited literature in the area, the present paper provides an overview of 'learner identity' as an emergent concept. While doing so, the concept has been explored using the larger theoretical framework of 'communities of practice' by Lave and Wenger which closely connects the act of learning with the process of identification. Owing to the anticipated future of virtual learning, the paper also puts forth the need for studying learner identity in the context of online education. The paper concludes by reiterating the relevance of learner identity not just for individual learners but for the entire educational community, especially in response to the multi-faceted educational requirements of contemporary times. The overall goal of the paper is to emphasize the role of learner identity as the most relevant identity type that nurtures not just one's educational experiences but one's way of life.

KEYWORDS: Learner identity, learning, virtual learning, communities of practice.

INTRODUCTION

Identity as an area of inquiry continues to gain academic attention despite a plethora of work already existing surrounding the process of identity construction. The core of understanding identity lies in acknowledging its dynamic, multidimensional and permeable nature (Taylor, 2015). Owing to this ever evolving nature of identity, especially against the backdrop of a rapidly changing sociocultural context, it remains imperative to explore how identities are constantly negotiated and contested by individuals.

Speaking of identity in educational contexts becomes all the more crucial because of a multitude of reasons. First of all, the changing educational landscape demands a better understanding of the individual differences existing amid learners of various kinds. The educational system is now, more than ever, endowed with a greater responsibility of catering to individuals coming from diverse backgrounds, distinct learning goals and different pace of learning. The classrooms today are different from the earlier times in the sense that individuals from different castes, classes, religions, cultures are sharing the same space for acquiring knowledge (Sabharwal & Malish, 2017). These changes have happened gradually but the impact is much more crucial. Increased access to formal education has made it possible for different individuals to study in the same physical space. But this kind of unique diversity also requires that the educational system is sensitive to these changes and more importantly, is prepared to understand its implications on the individuals themselves and how they contest and make sense of who they are, via mediums of formal learning.

The present paper attempts to have an insight into the perception of students as learners in the process of acquiring education. This would prove to be instrumental in assimilating the many coexisting identities of students in a better way amid a common learning space. But more importantly, it would have implications for the students themselves. How a student views oneself as a learner may provide insights into the view held by students in general about their own capacity to learn and apply something in the process of gaining formal education. Knowing about the students' perception of what is challenging, what needs more immediate and specific attention in order to acquire their learning goals will add greatly to the overall development of one's identity as a learner (Osguthorpe, 2006). This can be seen as a commentary on how one's social positioning affects one's self-identification as a learner. How one's self-perception as a learner is also a result of one's perceived ability, past experiences, goals, self-esteem and the overall wellbeing. How one sees oneself as a learner has implications for a student's academic motivation and engagement, which in turn further decides one's social position in the society.

Relevance of studying identity in educational contexts

It is worthwhile to study the identification processes of students as learners as it serves as the bedrock on which the students form their perception towards themselves as individuals, and not just students. Students' perception of themselves as learners could be positive or negative depending on their educational and social experiences, which in turn may influence their perception towards learning. It is crucial to throw some light on the identification process the students engage in and how this identity comes into existence along with the various factors involved in it. Research (Lorenzo-Quiles et al, 2023)) reveals that many students experience issues with adaptation being in their educational institutions and that can create a sense of dissonance in their present experiences of being a learner and what they would become in the future. This dissonance has led to issues like students' frustration and drop outs. Exploring how students negotiate meaning in their educational experiences provide us insights into their process of identity construction.

The process of self-construction as a learner holds immense value for the entire educational experience of an individual. This learning experience comprises the actual content of learning, the context of learning and most importantly, the way one makes sense of his or her own self in the learning context. Being able to acknowledge these elements and being able to make sense of their own changing identities while being in the process is one of the goals as well as a by-product of being a learner. The ability of one's self to negotiate the constant interaction between the learning context and the learning content in the process of 'becoming' a learner. This becoming is what also signifies the way one's identity is being established and constantly changing in the educational contexts. Therefore, the educational situations where learning is taking place foster a specific type of identity that is constructed alongside other identities, but is indeed context specific according to the characteristics of the activity.

Apart from the educational implications of exploring identity construction of students, the literature in the concerned area is another reason for digging this area further. Though the notion of identity seems to be occupying an increasingly larger space in educational research, the interest in students' identity as learners has so far been limited (Coll & Falsafi, 2010). Despite the increasing research interest in the area of identity and education, the process of becoming and changing as a learner is either neglected or not ascribed much significance. If learning is a resource for individual and societal survival, it is surprising that the identity that mediates it is decently under researched. The limited literature available on this identity implies that one's identity as a learner is the main mediator of participation in learning situations and as such deserves the special attention of policy makers and practitioners.

It is crucial to rethink individuals as learners in educational settings because it has implications for how learning takes place in any learning space and most importantly how the individual, as a learner, makes sense of his/her identity. More so because learning institutions act as fundamental spaces for the construction of one's sense of self and not just knowledge construction. It is important that the learning spaces students are exposed to provide them with appropriate resources in terms of space, means and support so that the students can explore how they can find their way into the actual world and contribute, through a process of learning. Learning spaces should be able to provide the students with concepts that speak to different identities (for instance, gender, caste or learner identity) of an individual or different individuals and also with the required means

and resources that would help them explore their identities and its construction. In this way, focusing on identity would help enable the exploration of the process of recognition in a social context for the students.

Learner Identity: an emergent concept

Speaking of identity construction in educational contexts, it is worth discussing how Bernstein spoke of identity as a result of being a part of specific different disciplines and the experiences which emerge from being a part of them (Bernstein, 2018. This implies that the disciplinary training, and in Wenger's (1998) terms, the specific community one is a part of, has a huge role to play in developing and establishing one's identity. How strong or relevant this identity will become for the person will also depend upon the overall socialization process of the teaching-learning process. Hence, the subject matter and the discipline is a crucial component but not the only component that determines identity construction in educational settings. An important contribution in this direction is his idea of 'pedagogic device'. Bernstein describes these pedagogic devices as those crucial factors which help shape an individual's identity in educational spaces. The content of the subject, power relations embedded in formal learning spaces, and the relationship between the teachers and students are some of the most important pedagogic devices. Basically, the pedagogic devices assist in the process through which education and learning is made much more formalized and institutionalized. It is imperative to talk about these concepts and ideas to better understand the background against which individuals' identity evolve as learners.

Having said that, Bernstein's conception of identity in learning spaces can be traced back as only one of the initial attempts to highlight this area. More scholarly contributions were added later on, but the idea of 'learner identity' still remained relatively new and is still unfolding as an emergent concept. Norton (2000, 2011) gave useful insight into the role of language learning and its impact on identity formation. Using the concept of 'investment', Norton talks about the importance of investment and how one's perception of themselves as a learner needs to be understood as something which is mediated by the socio-cultural context too rather than something which is completely innate or much more individual centric. In that sense, the idea of investment pairs well with the more psychologically nuanced attributes like motivation. When an individual makes an investment in learning a subject matter (language learning, in this case), they do so consciously with an expectation of an increase in their existing resources which will eventually improve their role and participation in the social community. In more literal terms then, when learners invest, they are doing so with an expectation of return, but not just academic in nature but a return that builds their social positioning. The person's investment may increase or decrease depending upon the nature of power dynamics in a particular classroom and also the practices in the classroom. If those practices are, for example, discriminatory, then the person will not invest a great deal even if the innate motivation to learn is there. Therefore, investment is a concept mediated by the social structures existing within a classroom rather than something which is only guided by the individual's interest and motivation. Speaking of what all guides a person's identity formation as a learner, the role of one's self-worth and self-awareness have been identified as important guiding factors (Crick & Wilson, 2005). Learner identity implies a more holistic approach to becoming a person with a learning identity which is shaped by one's values, attitudes and belief systems. All these things make it possible for a person to become more self-aware, which in turn impacts one's self-worth as well.

The Centre for Learner Identity Studies (CLIS) at Edgehill University, in their first annual conference (2014), discussed a model of learner identity based on gender, generation, place, social class, ethnicity and spirituality/religion. According to this perspective, the learner identity of an individual is influenced by these six bases and contributes collectively to what it means to be a learner. This definition of learner identity invited criticism from other researchers describing the approach to be 'erroneous' in nature (Falsafi, 2010) because "it describes multiple social identities rather than using a definition that is based purely on the activity of learning".

A feeling of belongingness contributes a great deal to the developments of one's learner identity. Solomon (2007) explained how mathematics learners described their experience of learning mathematics as devoid of a feeling of belongingness. He reflected how most learners, at best, were able to 'do' mathematics but were not able to contribute to it. This is because in order to be able to make relevant connections after learning something the learners should be able to feel like a part of the community (of mathematics, in this case). Despite being 'good students', they often feel a lack of belongingness in relation to what they are learning in the sense that they can't make meaning out of it. This often leads to identities of non-participation as opposed to identities of participation. The feelings of belongingness are often a result of the culture of the institution one goes to and how much that culture encourages learners to believe in their abilities and shape them at the same time. Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) echo the same belief on the importance of feeling a sense of belongingness to the institutional culture, the subject matter of learning and the overall learning experience. Whether one will be able to develop and acknowledge their learner identity will, in most parts, be determined by whether one feels a part of the institution or someone who finds it difficult to fit in. Reay et al (2009) cites two important aspects of having a learner identity: the goals of learning and the process through which the goals will be achieved. Therefore, educational institutions are required to cater to not just the

nurturing of students' identities but also acknowledge their individual goals and aspirations and provide them with the most suitable means to achieve them.

Having a learner identity has little to do with what one learns but more about seeing learning as the way to be. Kolb & Kolb (2009) talks about what he refers to as the learning identities as a way of being. People with learning identities believe in their capacity to learn and have an overall learning approach to life, regardless of the context. Instead of it being something that one adopts abruptly or reaches as a destination, the process of acquiring learning identity is a gradual one. In this process, the beginning is attaining a learning approach towards life which then culminates into having a greater sense of self-esteem about one's learning abilities and gradually developing a learning self-identity. According to Kolb, the key to maintaining this learning identity is via fruitful social interactions and relationships (2009).

The most comprehensive understanding of the concept of learner identity came from Coll & Falsafi's work in 2010. They viewed learner identity in light of the socio-cultural perspective of learning that treats learning as an act of social participation and thus, identity bears direct influence from it. To quote Coll & Falsafi, learner identity "is the conceptual artifact that contains, connects and enables reflection over the emotional and cognitive processes of the experience of becoming and being a learner, in the past as well as in the present and the future" (Coll & Falsafi, 2010). According to them, in order to explore learner identity from a socio-cultural perspective, there's a need to acknowledge three important aspects of this perspective. The first is the discursive nature of identity. Here, the discursive features of identity are a reference to the mode in which the identity is being constructed. Although discourse is the primary mode of identity construction, but not the only one, since non-discursive actions, e.g. gestures, physical positioning, level of exposure to the surrounding etc., also are used. Second, that identity construction is deeply embedded in activity and as part of social practice. The activity is defined by its object, which in turn defines the nature or the type of identity. In other words, the activity defines the content of the identity or the meanings that are being constructed about oneself. Third, that recognition is crucial for identity construction. Hence, having an identity is to have a sense of recognition as someone. The meanings that are being constructed about oneself need to be recognized or else they cannot endure throughout and beyond the activity.

Lawson, after reviewing the existing work on learner identity defines it as "the way an individual feels about himself/herself as a learner and the extent to which he/she describes himself/herself as a 'learner'." (Lawson, 2014). Lawson asserts that this recognition of oneself as a learner is affected by a number of factors like one's levels of motivation, institutional support, a feeling of belongingness etc. A learner's past learning experiences play a vital role in how they will see their future learning goals and identities. From Lawson's study of undergraduate students' learner identity, we can understand the relevance of exploring the concept of learner identity as it has evident implications for individuals who do not necessarily think of themselves as having a positive learner identity. In such scenarios, it is the responsibility of the institutions to support and help students form a more positive learner identity by identifying the problem areas. Because if students think of themselves as having a negative learner identity, that has implications for their performance completion and progression. While contemplating on the importance of learner identity, Parkinson et al (2021) in their paper evaluate the relevance of learner identity in the 21st century in the context of the changing nature of learning. They make a case for rethinking the idea of learning as a key competency wherein it is the need of the hour to learn how to learn and focus on learner identity. Parkinson further asserts that in today's time, the need for defining learner identity is much more pronounced so that its relevance as a multidimensional nature is highlighted and utilized. Expanding upon this idea of rethinking learning, the next section reflects upon the link between learning and identity formation in light of Wenger's communities of practice.

The relationship between learning and identity: Revisiting 'communities of practice'

Etienne Wenger, in his classic text 'Communities of Practice' reflected on the nature of learning as social participation (Wenger, 1998). His reflection stemmed from the larger understanding of learning as an individualistic process which is understood to be isolated from other activities. He tried to rethink a learning which is found within the four walls of the classroom and devoid of any possible social distraction outside of that classroom. As a re-conceptualization of the process of learning, Wenger proposed a few assumptions about the nature of learning, what is to be learned and who learns. At the heart of learning, for Wenger, lies the social nature of human beings and that forms the fundamental premise of learning. This assumption is implicative of the social nature of learning which cannot be understood in isolation of the external participation in and of the world we live in. The second assumption proposes that to learn is to actively participate and engage with the world and that any learning is realized and implemented through participation with what is social. The third assumption relates to the product that any kind of learning seeks, that is, meaning. This meaning is manifested in the way one participates in the world and how those experiences are deemed to be meaningful by the agent.

With this background in place, we can reflect on learning as an act of social participation. Although, what this participation signifies here is important to under-

stand. When Wenger proposes to rethink learning as social participation, he doesn't mean this participation as merely engaging with a few activities of the society. Rather, it implies an active engagement of the learner with the various practices that exist within a society which helps form many different communities. It is through this active engagement in these practices of the society that one comes to 'learn' as well as comes to 'be'. In other words, acts of participation in these communities are integral to the process of learning as well as identity. In the words of Wenger, "such participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do." (Wenger, 1998, p.4)

Thinking about communities of practice and their relevance and influence, it can be utilized as an important thinking tool, especially to rethink learning and understand identity construction. It allows us to reflect how despite their presence all around us, these communities are not explicitly realized yet appear to be so familiar to our existence. Without thinking consciously about it, we know what members belong and do not belong to a certain community of practice; particularly to our community of practice. We are also aware of the kind of participation we and others have in a particular community of practice; core participation or peripheral participation. How individuals understand learning is crucial in order to make use of that learning appropriately. Viewing learning as social participation implies that learning is not just something that an individual 'learns' within a classroom, but it is a question of active engagement. Engagement with our respective and multiple communities we are a part of. It is through learning that we become active participants in these communities of practice and we stay there by contributing to such practices. And it is through learning that the communities we are a part of are able to refine their practices to ensure their longevity.

Now, to address the why bit of the question in the aforementioned paragraph, that is, why is there a need to rethink learning from a social participation perspective? It's no surprise that learning holds a very important place in our society. Not just individuals, organizations, the nation, we all collectively seek to make learning as efficient as possible for the whole society. The overall goal is to make learning happen, and for that we make school curriculum, a proper education system, teaching practices, so on and so forth. There is no doubt that we, as a society, are vested in the interest of learning and acknowledge that learning influences all of us; be it the individuals, communities or organizations. Therefore, it is imperative to reflect on the perspectives of learning and how we understand the fundamental nature of learning, and of the learners involved because if we do it without due reflection, we may run the risk of defeating the very purpose that learning seeks; to contribute to the society and to our own development. It is important to think of our conception of learning because more than understanding what learning actually is, our conception of it can have implications on the real learning that occurs and how we view the learner and the content of learning itself.

When we think of learning in its social dimensions, we try to situate learning as a mediator between the individual and the surrounding world. And the concept of communities of practice allows us to think of learning as this very mediator. For Wenger, communities of practice do not exist by themselves; instead they act as a medium to rethink learning in its social dimensions (Wenger, 2010, p.179) as the individual and the social constitute each other through acts of mutual participation. And the resulting product of that social structure and the processes of meaning making within it are understood as learning. In this way, we can think of learning as something that takes place through active engagement and interaction which is embedded in culture and history. And by making use of these actions and interactions we can come to see how learning is capable of both imitating and modifying the socio-cultural milieu in which it occurs (Wenger, 1998, p.13). Learning is the tool through which the practices within the society are born and sustained. It is through learning, when seen in its social context that it allows and helps inclusion of new members in these communities and help them become who they will become; through interaction, action and contribution. Thus, learning could be rethought as social participation as well as identity formation.

As discussed above, learning, when viewed in its social dimensions, guides our participation as well as non-participation in the societal realm. In this sense, and as Wenger appropriately pointed out, learning "is an experience of identity" (Wenger, 1998, p.215). In other words, the whole process of becoming and belonging is an intertwined experience that is constantly negotiated within the larger social structure. Learning brings transformation to the individuals by acts of meaning making, negotiating their social positioning, their abilities and their actions. Therefore, learning can and does transform who we are and what we can do. For Wenger, learning accommodates both a process and a space (Wenger, 1998, p.215). The process of learning is the one that transforms knowledge into something more concrete and something with more meaning and value attached to it. As much as the process of acquiring knowledge is crucial to the identity of a being, the appropriate space for it is equally important. So many times the effectiveness of any kind of learning is denied because of the unavailability of the right context or space for learning to happen. Therefore, somebody's failure to learn something isn't a question on the individual's ability to learn but may in fact hint towards the role of the learning appropriate context in which the learning can occur.

Learner identity as the guiding identity: lessons from the pandemic and the way ahead

The area of education attracts a great deal of research even today and has been doing so for the past many years. Identity construction in educational spaces has also gained considerable attention. Despite this, the notion of learner identity remains an emergent concept and thus, needs deeper exploration to be able to answer relevant questions about the genesis, composition and outcome of the said identity. The present paper aims to highlight and make a case for bringing learner identity at the forefront of the identity discourse, especially while considering the educational context. As mentioned earlier in this paper, on one hand, identity construction is an issue of great exploration in educational contexts and a great deal of work can be seen on various identities of a person like gender, culture etc. On the other hand, the mention of learner identity seems relatively new and scarce when, in fact, it needs to be recognised as the most crucial identity for learners in the educational contexts. The relevance of this becomes even more if we keep in mind the changing educational landscape, the virtual teaching-learning process and the overall changing nature of learning itself.

First of all, the literature lacks a coherent definition of the concept of 'learner identity'. By saying this, the attempt is not to reduce the complexity and multidimensionality of learner identity but to move in a more focused direction regarding the composition and nature of this specific kind of identity. This will help the concept to gain more academic spotlight and will start a discourse centred around learner identity. It is also important, and perhaps, a goal for future research to highlight the important role of the socio-cultural context in which the learner identity evolves. Parkinson et al (2021) rightly emphasizes the same thought that to be able to define learner identity is to be able to acknowledge and appreciate the evolutionary and organic nature of learner identity. The one which reflects the growth of an individual as a process of both becoming and being a learner and not just a fixed destination that one would aspire for. In that sense, learner identity can be understood as a 'way of being' via paths of learning taking place in various social contexts. Parkinson further stresses how learner identity is best understood by focusing on the idiosyncrasies and lived experiences of the individual and their life story based in their unique socio-cultural contexts (Parkinson et al, 2021). Another important thing is understanding the pathway through which the learner 'comes to be', in other words, how the learner has made use of various pedagogical resources and personal skills and strategies to acquire learning over a period of time.

Another area where exploring learner identity becomes important is when we try to trace the educational outcomes for a variety of learners. While studying identity in learning spaces, it is important to understand the process of identity formation in relation to the communities and learning group of the person concerned. Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice incorporated this perspective whilst exploring identity transformation and learning as mutually influencing. So, when we think of an individual participating in a community of practice and consider how the individual undergoes identity transformation as he/she becomes a core member of the community, it is imperative to consider a few things. First, the individual belonging to the learning community does not exist in isolation (Hughes, 2010). In fact, the same individual is a part of multiple communities of practice and all of them share an interactive and overlapping relationship with each other making the identity construction an amalgamation of one's social and learner identity (Reay, 2006). Second, the individual needs to find a sense of coherence in their respective group identities and the wider social identities from other community memberships. In fact, according to Hughes, not only do the individuals need to have this sense of coherence amongst these identities, but they actively strive to maintain this coherence, as a consequence of which categories like gender, ethnicity or class appear to have some stability (Hughes, 2010). But at the same time, there exists multiple identity performances and changing discursive meanings of identity. This implies that identity is always in the process of being contested and keeps finding different ways of coming to the surface and leads to changing identity positions as a result of inherent contradictions in the process. At the end of the day, it's a conflict or interaction between the identity performed by the individual and the resources one's group membership provides to nurture or discourage that very identity. So, although Wenger's conception speaks of identity transformation in sync with the changing communities, it does not really talk about the specific ways through which individuals seek to maintain this coherence in their multiple identities. He also does not pay enough attention to the fact that these communities are not always linked to each other in a coherent manner and some of them exist as rather exclusive (Fuller et al, 2005) from each other. In that case, identity coherence becomes even more difficult. This access to achieving coherence between different types of identity is an important reason to explore learner identity further. In the absence of coherence between one's learner identity and other identities emerging from various groups, the learner will have to make a choice between consistent negotiation or adjusting to the incongruences. Such incongruences have been shown to lead to dissonance and have serious educational outcomes for the students vis a vis student dropout and frustration, low engagement, low motivation and instances of alienation (for example, Holmegaard et al, 2012).

Now with the emergence of online teaching, there is also a need to rethink the existing communities of practice within the educational settings. As per lave and Wenger, the communities of practice have three structural components: domain, community and practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is interesting to decode how the essence of what is termed as the 'communities of practice' has undergone sig-

nificant change due to the pandemic and resulting online education. With the emergence of technological advancements, the transition of physical communities of practice into virtual communities of practice is something which has immense potential for the overall teaching-learning process. The shared domain of interest can have enhancing or restrictive implications for the teaching-learning process depending upon the nature of the subject being taught. Some subjects can be taught just fine via a virtual setting, on the other hand, some require in-person assistance for better learning (experiential learning, experiments, field-visits etc, for example).

The role of the context in which learning is being negotiated by the learner holds great importance in determining the learning outcomes as well as learning motivation and objectives. The said context has become virtual, for most parts, in the last two years. Virtual education is not a new phenomenon (for example, the existence of e-communities and MOOCs), but it is different from the way virtual education was being shared in the context of a pandemic. The former being established in addition to an otherwise 'normal' world which existed physically, for most parts. When we speak of a pandemic bound virtual education, the students aren't just living a virtual student life but also are alienated from the physical socialization process, shared values, practices and co-creation of knowledge. Whilst talking about the role of the context, it is important to acknowledge and understand how the covid-19 pandemic unravelled the various socio-economic disparities that were perhaps better hidden in a normal setting. In case of an online setting, these disparities may have the potential to come to the surface for the under-privileged students. Having an awareness of it may impact the process of learning, the concerned outcomes and consequently, the self-esteem of the students (Sequeira & Dacey, 2020). The digital divide that came about in the learning community as a result of the pandemic has severe consequences for students' educational access and experiences (Correia, 2020).

The interactive plane that students have access to in a physical classroom serves as the site for identity contestation by virtue of a constant negotiation between their social positioning and the shared understanding within a classroom. The same plane also acts as spaces where students gain information and insight, not just about the subject matter but also into who they are, that is, their sense of identity (Bhaba, 2001). The anticipated coherence between how a student relates to his/herself and the space one has to express and grow into can get compromised if the student fails to accommodate either of these identities with the other one. According to Park (2012), in a virtual teaching-learning setup, learner identity is encouraged only if the learning portal is functioning towards creating a shared community wherein learners are working jointly to achieve certain goals. If the online teaching-learning process has to be successful, the interactive feature of a physical classroom needs to be reciprocated to online classrooms too.

The area of identity construction in online spaces is still emerging. Delahunty et al (2013) discussed how a sense of interconnectedness and community can serve to enhance students' experience of online learning and also make them more aware of their own identities. In fact, when the online teaching learning process is more of a necessity now (Dhawan, 2020), its influence on identity contestation deserves separate exploration. The covid-19 pandemic revealed how the entire educational process had to reassess its strategies owing to the nature of the crisis and its impact on the educational experience of the student community. More than ever now, the relevance of understanding and encouraging a learner identity is highlighted. It has become important to have the students grow with a learning orientation rather than just acquiring knowledge. The idea of learner identity supports and advances this very learning orientation. Along similar lines, Parkinson et al (2021) shares that having this learning orientation allows students to experience learning as a continuous process rather than something which is more rigid and stagnated in nature. Learning should not begin and end with the classroom experiences and evaluations. Students should be able to engage in the process of meaning making and make relevant connections between the learning acquired via formal education and the real world. Having said that, the encouragement of learner identity also demands a much more sensitive pedagogy which is focused on the learner as an active and dynamic being rather than a passive recipient of knowledge. At the core of learner identity lies the existence of the individual learner as an active, negotiating agent who is constantly in a process of constructing ways of being via one's learning experiences situated in their immediate context. The goal of teaching pedagogy then becomes to nurture and encourage students who identify themselves as lifelong learners (Parkinson et al, 2021). Learner identity is a crucial tool, especially in the current times, which helps accommodate diversity of learners by highlighting the learners' narratives of what it means to be a learner and how those experiences are and can be different depending upon their unique socio-cultural contexts.

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